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ABSTRACT

Impacts of the "Baby Boom" generation, the 75 million persons born between 1947 and 1962 in the United States, are analyzed. Factors influencing this unprecedented increase in birth rates included "catching up" by men who had been at war, a higher proportion of women in childbearing years, a decrease in the average marriage age, and the prosperous post-war economic situation, all of which led to the procreation ethic. From 1945 to the present, the baby boom has influenced suburban areas, television programming, and advertising campaigns. Educational institutions, however, were initially caught off-guard, resulting in a strain on academic pursuits and socialization. These conditions led to problems on college campuses in the 1960s and 1970s, which have been described not as a gap between young and old, but rather as a gap between the few and the many. Forces currently affecting the baby boom generation include a poor economic outlook, employment difficulties, increasing numbers of women in the work force, and a generally lower feeling of well-being. Two potential targets for change will be health care costs and the social security system. Predictions are for a more liberal ideology, an upturn in the economic outlook, increased political activity, more women in politics, and a migration to rural areas. (KC)

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The Major Impacts of the Baby Boom Cohort upon American Life, Past, Present and Future

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Section I

The Demographic Context of the Baby Boom: Trends and Projections

The single largest demographic phenomenon in the history of the United States occurred in a very short time span. The ramifications have been significant and will continue to be felt well into the next century. This phenomenon has to a great degree shaped marketing strategies, educational and government policies, given birth to billion dollar enterprises and generally reshaped our thinking toward a number of aspects of American life.

I am, of course, referring to the baby boom. The years between 1947-1962 are generally viewed as the baby boom years. During this fifteen year period, 75 million babies were born. These 75 million individuals represent the largest group of people to share a common temporal experience in the history of the United States. Thus, the baby boom cohort represents a demographic bulge with significantly smaller cohorts on either side. It has been likened to a pig in a python--a good graphic description of the large baby boom cohort, bordered as it is on both sides by cohorts much smaller in size.

Most demographers expect some degree of increased fertility after a major war; however, there were factors coming together that would make the U.S. baby boom particularly spectacular. The fact that the baby boom was so sustained and occurred in a highly industrialized nation gives the baby boom grounds for further examination.

A former director of the Bureau of the Census, in discussing the baby boom, indicated that the aging of the baby boom cohort will continue to be the major demographic factor well into the twenty-first century. (Plotkin, 1978)

This paper will show how the demographic behavior of a fifteen year period has, and will continue to have, an effect on our society for decades to come.

There will be three sections to this investigation. The first section will be concerned mainly with the examination of the demographic background of the United States since the Constitution. It is important to look to the past and isolate certain long-term trends which were completely defied by the parents of the baby boom cohort. The second section will deal specifically with the impacts of the baby boom cohort from 1945 to 1982. The third section will establish a number of projections regarding the future impacts as this baby boom bulge continues to move through various age categories. Landon Jones in his book Great Expectations has accused the baby boom cohort of being a "generational tyranny". This is a fitting label for a single cohort that has changed and continues to change every facet of society it chooses or deems necessary.

In order to more fully appreciate some of the subtle and not so subtle aspects of the baby boom, it would be best to establish the demographic context in which it occurred.

The United States Constitution mandated a census be taken at the beginning of each decade for purposes of Congressional representation and taxation of the various states. The first such census

took place in 1790, two years after the adoption of the Constitution.

That first census was a very crude yet unique effort. Crude in as that the information gathered amounted to little more than a simple count. The perceived threat of invasion of privacy was significant and not at all fitting for a new nation founded on a high degree of personal freedom and minimal government interference. The uniqueness of the 1790 census lies in the reported personal touches that were added by the federal marshalls charged with the task. Many census forms were tied in ribbon, and others were wrapped in flowered wallpaper...a far cry from the arrival of today's decenial form! (VanderTak, 1982)

When all the numbers were compiled, the official census figure for 1790 indicated there were four million citizens of this new country. Then Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson believed the census represented an undercount of the population. Thus, another modern conflict finds its roots in the birth of this nation: controversy aroused by the census.

The second census in 1800 enumerated 5.3 million Americans, an increase of 35 percent over the four million of a decade earlier. Significant growth rates such as this were commonplace until 1850 when there were a little over 23 million Americans. This figure represents an almost sixfold increase in population since the first census sixty years before.

The majority of the population lived in rural areas, typical of population distribution before the arrival of large scale industrialization. The year 1790 saw only five percent of the U.S. pop-

ulation living in urban areas. Furthermore, there were only six cities in the U.S. at that time which had populations of 8,000 or more: Philadelphia (then the U.S. capital), New York, Boston, Charleston, Baltimore, and Salem, Massachusetts. Clearly, we were a rural agrarian nation with a long way to go before approaching urban society. By 1850 still only fifteen percent of the population lived in cities. The decade of 1850 was considered to be the beginning of a trend reversal from rural to urban habitation which is still with us today.

Immigration, an aspect of another demographic variable, was beginning to play an increasingly significant role in the U.S. population growth and composition. By 1850 the U.S. was no longer clearly a nation of white, Anglo-Saxon protestants. By 1851 when Irish immigration reached its peak, immigration accounted for approximately half of the annual population growth. In terms of pure numbers, immigration reached its peak in 1904 and 1917 with 1.2 and 1.3 million legal immigrants respectively. This increase in hetereogeneous composition caused by the waves of immigrants brought about the cultural melting pot concept for which the U.S. became known. Immigration would remain high until after World War I.

Of the three components of population change (births, deaths, and migration) births or fertility have been the most important determinate of population change since the nation's beginning. In its early colonial era, the United States was one of the most prolifically fertile countries in recent history. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, American women were averaging eight to ten children

each. It was important to have children to help with work around the farm and there were reasonably high infant mortality rates--again, characteristics of a nation before industrialization. These high birth rates were soon to reverse themselves into a long-term decline. With the single exception of the baby boom, fertility has steadily declined since the first half of the nineteenth century. Reasons for this fit under a theory called demographic transition.

The catalyst for demographic transition is industrialization like that experienced in the American industrial revolution. The demographic transition theory states that a population's fertility and mortality rates will both decline from high to low levels as a result of economic and social development. The decline in mortality usually precedes the decline in fertility, resulting in a "lag-time" of high population growth during the transition. As industrialization became wide-spread, and with it a better quality of life, mortality and fertility rates began the predicted steady decline.

Another trend mentioned earlier began to increase in development. Urbanization, the handmaiden of industrialization, increased. This shift from rural to population growth in and around urban areas is, like declining fertility rates, another long term trend which has continued to the present. By 1900, forty percent of the population was concentrated in urban areas; in the mid 1940's two-thirds of the population lived in urban areas.

As a society becomes more urbanized, the benefits of children become outweighed by the costs of children. In rural areas, children are perceived (in an economic sense) as extra hands for the

rural chores. In urban areas where there is less room, children are perceived as non-productive costs. The interconnectedness of urbanization and declining fertility rates is undeniable and serves to lend credence to the demographic transition theory.

To sum up and set the context for the baby boom, the following demographic changes since our first census in 1790 should be noted:

1. The population, with an ever expending base, has grown from approximately 4 million in 1790 to approximately 230 million in 1980.

2. The population increased in hetereogeneity due to the open immigration policies until the 1940's giving the U.S. the distinction of admitting more individuals to our shores than any other country in the world.

3. The segment of population classified as urban has increased from five percent in 1790 to over seventy percent in 1980.

The single most important aspect of the baby boom was its sheer size. Everyone seemed to expect a rise in fertility as our returning warriors merged with society. This expectation implied also that the increased fertility would be short-lived, following patterns of the past. Thereafter, the U.S. birth rate would quickly return to the steady long-term decline mentioned earlier. There were at least three major flaws in this thinking. First, the returning soldier was only one of many factors that had been building for approximately two decades prior to World War II. When these factors combined, the "critical mass" led to unprecedented fertility in the post-way years. Second, the incredibly positive economic conditions which were prevalent during the late forties through the early sixties were an ele-

ment that was difficult to forecast, and as will be seen, played a major role in the sustained U.S. baby boom. Finally, a mass psychological phenomenon, labeled the "procreation ethic" (Jones, 1980) took hold of America and did not dissipate until much later than any other country which was involved in the war.

The baby boom in the United States is truly unique by any standard. The unexpectedness of the prolonged U.S. baby boom and its resultant size caught most, if not all, institutions and agencies off guard. Again, picturing the pic in the python analogy, one can see that the U.S. had previously experienced a small cohort (the 1930's "good times" cohort). All of our institutions, from hospitals to schools to businesses were geared to a smaller population and really had no reason to expect the unprecedented size of the baby boom, given the long tern fertility decline the U.S. had experienced for the last century. More specifically, the long term decline in fertility reached a low point in the mid 1930's and remained at that low level for several years because of poor economic conditions and a relatively smaller proportion of women in child-bearing years.

The "critical mass" of factors leading to the baby boom should be examined to more fully appreciate the reasons for this phenomenon. A list of interacting factors can be found in Robert Weller's and Leon Bouvier's book Population: Demography and Policy. In this book, the authors cite eight factors:

1. "Catching up" by men who had been at war.
2. Delayed marriage and/or child-bearing because of the economic insecurities created by the depression.
3. The proportion of women in the child-bearing years during this time was greater than normal. This resulted from the higher fertility rate of the 1920's relative to the 1930's.

4. The percentage of women who remained single dropped significantly in this period.
5. Childlessness declined to a new low.
6. The three- or four-child family became the norm, as people moved to the suburbs and had more space to raise children.
7. The prosperous post-war economic situation encouraged parents to have an extra child.
8. The average age at marriage decreased, and people began having their children sooner after marriage and closer together.

All of these factors contributed to the baby boom. The people born in the period between 1945 and 1962 will represent a bulge in the age-sex composition of the nation's population throughout their lives.

Three important factors will serve as a backdrop for our purposes of examining the impacts of the baby boom in the next section. The first was the fact that prior to 1945 the long-term fertility rates were in a steady decline in the U.S. The generation before the baby boom, was, in fact, the smallest in the history of the U.S. This long-term decline could be attributed in part to the theory of demographic transition.

The second factor was that immediately prior to the baby boom a number of variables were forming a "critical mass" and setting the stage for a potentially explosive post-war birth rate which would completely defy the principles contained in the theory of demographic transition.

The third factor concerning the baby boom is in regard to its selective international distribution. Besides the United States, three other countries had a significant and sustained post-war baby boom. These countries were: Australia, Canada and New Zealand. There were shared reasons which allowed these four nations to in-

crease their populations by approximately one-third after the war. Landon Jones (1980) enumerated these factors:

1. They had gone to the war; the war never reached their shores.
2. None of these countries were old and settled in their ways--they were countries based on new and future hope.
3. All of these countries had an abundance of natural resources.
4. All were considered spacious and under-populated.
5. These countries had great expectations for the future and the satisfaction of victory in an awesome war.
6. All four of these countries had extremely prosperous post-war economies, led by the United States.

All of these factors combined to form a psychology of child-bearing known as the "procreation ethic". The standard family size of three to four children had been preferred for quite some time. With the depression now behind us, the war brought to victorious closure and a booming post-war economy, the preferred family size was in reach of many more Americans. This is a key to understanding the baby boom. The baby boom was not the result of a few Americans having large families (five or more children), it was the result of a larger base of Americans having a medium sized family (two to four children). It is important to remember that in the post-war years, individuals were marrying younger, a larger percentage of individuals were getting married, a large percentage of women were in their child-bearing years, and the catalyst; the economic outlook was very good and therefore conducive to having more children.

The unique combination of these variables coupled with a revitalized sense of an extremely bright outlook for our nation contributed to this unique temporal phenomenon known as the baby boom.

The next section of this examination will show the impacts of this "generational tyranny" on American life from 1945 to 1982. Again, it is important to realize that the expected baby boom in the immediate post-war years represented only the nose of the camel under the tent. The sustained nature of the baby boom and its impact on American life has been and will continue to be one of the most significant forces in our society.

Section II

Past Impacts of the Baby Boom Cohort: 1945-1982

The result of the previously mentioned factors produced the single largest cohort in U.S. history--75 million babies born between 1947 and 1962. This single cohort represents one-third of the American population.

Past a point it would seem that the sheer size of the baby boom should have alerted certain farsighted demographers and planners that some significant changes were coming and that adjustments in several sectors would be necessary.

It is generally accepted that the size of a generation shapes its life. When generations are the same approximate size, the passing of the guard is orderly. However, when you have a large generation wedged between two smaller generations (as is the baby boom generation) then the socialization process undergoes some severe strains. This is the type of generational imbalance that contains the seeds of revolution.

However, it was not the case that demographers and planners foresaw the coming wave of a large, youthful generation, and as a result, were caught off guard. In fairness, by looking at past long-term trends, there probably didn't seem to be too much reason for alarm. Because of the long-term decline in fertility which had preceded the baby boom, this phenomenon was perceived as a momentary blip on the demographic radar screen and soon things would return to normal. The demographers had predicted that the baby boom would end very soon. It was a matter of the returning soldiers running

their course. The baby boom was perceived as a unique side-show in American life--little did we realize that as Landon Jones puts it: "...the side-show was on its way to becoming the main event."

This cohort in its sheer size represents a "bulge" which will be its characteristic until the cohort wanes in the next century. The bulge has and will continue to bully its way through life, changing social agencies and institutions and, of course, the private sector. The attention which was found wanting from demographers and social planners was more than made up for by enterprising business people. The private sector realized the immense buying power represented by the baby boom cohort and responded almost from the first. The baby boom was the first generation to be targeted by Madison Avenue as a specific market, and a super market at that.

One of the many major impacts of the procreation ethic and resultant baby boom was the large scale creation of the suburbs. More room and safer facilities were necessary in which to raise children. The suburbs amounted to a new cultural element in American life. The values, attitudes and interaction patterns found in the suburbs was an occurrence which was hard to match in U.S. history.

Living at a distance from the center of business and schools made the second car a necessity. Other than getting to the grocery for food for all those children, there was a need for transportation to school and its myriad functions; also, social instruments such as the cub/boy/girl scouts, little league sports, and various clubs beckoned to the teeming youth. The list of activities which grew because of this cohort was never ending. So the suburbs, attendant infra-

structure, and the second automobile were two of the first major societal shifts precipitated by the baby boom, and were literally made for each other.

A new kind of light began illuminating these households. Instead of a regular element found in a light bulb, the light was emitted from a cathode ray tube developed in the early thirties but not marketed with a great deal of success until the middle to late forties.

This is the type of coincidence that precipitates large and long-lasting societal changes. The television and the baby boom cohort, for better or worse, were partners for life. Suddenly the market place could enter your home with amazing clarity. TV is probably the best general barometer of what age spectrum the baby boom cohort occupies. When the cohort was young, the popular shows were produced in response to their age. Disney built an empire, the result of appealing to the tastes of a child-oriented society. One of Disney's many successes was the Davy Crockett series and the resulting marketing fad. Within just seven months, the Davy Crockett market grossed more than 100 million 1955 dollars. (Jones, 1980, p. 44)

This was the largest television-baby boom marketing bonanza to that point and the economic potential of the baby boom has been shaping the American business sector ever since. Products have been and will continue to be developed specifically for this cohort throughout its lifetime. Because of its sheer numbers, it will continue to produce billion-dollar businesses.

A glowing illustration of the baby boom's economic ability is the success of the rock music industry. Retail sales figures for

records went from $182 million in 1954 to $400 million in 1957 and then to $521 million in 1960 (Jones, 1980). This time period was only a beginning. The music made the culture of youth and the culture of youth made the music. As a higher percentage of the baby boomers moved to the "musically influenced" age the retail sales figures continued to soar and increasing numbers of individuals rose to musical prominence almost overnight.

Another corollary to the economic power of the baby boom was the power of this cohort to spread its influence to surrounding generations. This is exemplified by a statement made by a president of Thom McAn shoes who stated, "If you can't succeed with them you can't succeed at all", and "What they demand today, their elders will demand tomorrow." (Rooney, 1969)

The media planners and advertisers have also learned to modify their product presentation in an attempt to follow this exceptionally large market. The question many marketers have pondered is, should we continue to pursue the traditional youth market even as it shrinks in numbers, or should we reposition our products for the larger market as it ages? According to Bryant Robey in his article, "A Guide to the Baby Boom" (1979) many advertisers have "... changed their pitch to keep in time with the baby boom."

The baby boom cohort's economic power was understood almost from the beginning. But there were other powers which this group had that were on the horizon which certain elements of our society had not yet pondered. Education, the main enculturation tool of any society, had some big surprises down the road--but let's start at the beginning.

We know that the sustained nature of the baby boom was unanticipated (See Appendix A). The schools were caught completely off guard. When the first baby boomers reached school age in the early 1950's, they exerted an unrelenting force on education at all levels which did not dissipate until just recently. Again the bulge, in forcing its way through the python, rearranged the educational system.

The baby boom cohort, arriving amid the bliss of good economic times, was repeatedly told they would be the best-prepared Americans so far. They would be more highly educated, reap the benefits of the strong economy, and so on. Schools are age-specific institutions; that is, you enter and exit at specific ages. This fact, coupled with the unpreparedness of this institution, resulted in an overload not only in academic pursuits, but also in the socialization process which is an equally important charge of public school. The sub-standard public schooling coupled with a weak socialization process later became a catalyst for the problems on the college campuses in the sixties and seventies. Another set of reasons must come from the national and international pictures which these young minds were having to acknowledge.

The idealism exhibited by college students of the sixties and seventies was due in major part to the world in which they grew up. Examples of highly charged memories must include the myriad aspects of the Cold War, including the North/South Korean "policing action," the countless "A-bomb drills", the assassination of an extremely charismatic president, and the list goes on. Two distinct

results manifested themselves in later years. The first was an idealism which sought to end the types of horror which loomed large in the baby boomers' early experience regarding nuclear conflict or any type of conflict. Secondly, the seeming lack of ability to make strong, long-lasting commitments because of the real or perceived transient nature of their lives and the world; i.e., a flash of light and it's over. Societal turmoil attributed to the baby boom cohort was a reflection of the times in which this cohort grew up and the fact that they found political and cultural power in their large numbers. Once again, this "generational tyranny" went to work. This time it was the institutions of higher learning and the society in general who felt their effects.

On the college campuses the call for "relevancy" emerged. Certain traditional requirements, such as foreign languages, were replaced by "relevant" courses such as film critique. Student power was the result of an extended holding tank. It was important to keep this massive cohort out of the labor market for as long as possible so the market could adjust. Higher educational institutions served this purpose by prolonging adolescence within their ivy towers.

The fact that more individuals were of college age coupled with more students going to college produced a one-two punch which was hard for the campus administrations to deal with. What could they do? Appease and submit--it was felt this cohort would eventually subside.

The campuses also served as a springboard to address social issues. The Vietnam War, the evils of segregation, the corrupt "establishment", the perceived blasé attitude of the older generation--

these issues and more represented a long agenda targeted for change. The counter-culture had arrived and it would not be pacified. It had to run its course.

Many individuals blamed this youth initiated societal turmoil on the traditional scapegoat: the generation gap. However, there was a distinct difference between the omnipresent generation gaps of old and this particular cohort's clamoring. The problem was found in the same phenomenon that allows this cohort to strong-arm its way through all phases of life--its size. There was a gap all right, but it was not in young and old, it was in the many versus the few. As Norman Ryder indicated, our ability to deal with the problems of youth was eroded by the abnormally small size of the cohort in power (Ryder, 1974). The combination of mushroom cloud nightmares, assassination, hyped-up ideology conflicts between super powers, seemingly enormous cost outlays for defense which could have been used to build hospitals, schools, etc. all led these cold war children to believe in and to demand a better world. The time was now, transformation was due. All of their parents' hopes and dreams for them were forsaken for a new path.

Time changes all things and the Woodstock generation was resigned to the aging process. As the storm of the sixties and seventies subsided, the baby boom cohort attended to the task of seeking employment, mates, and generally joining the human race. Once the full scope of the baby boom's size was recognized, fears arose that the baby echo of the baby boom cohort would force the baby boom's size to pale in significance. To date, this has not occurred. There probably is no reason to believe that this particular cohort would

do anything that could be so easily forecasted.

The impact of the baby boom cohort on marriage, child-bearing, and employment is somewhat aberrant. There is more than just a subtle connection between these three endeavors.

Just as a flourishing economy encouraged the baby boom parents to marry early and have more children, a troubled economy complete with the relatively new stagflation (high unemployment and high inflation) has served as a deterrent to marriage and child-bearing within the baby boom.

Richard Easterlin has hypothesized that since the 1940's the size of a generation is a major economic factor which relates to the marital and child-bearing rates of that cohort and also predicts the general health of the economy (Easterlin, 1980). If one subscribes to Easterlin's explanation then the baby boom's cohort size is again a deciding factor. Prior to this stage of life the baby boom's size gave them a wherewithal to determine its possibilities. In this phase of life the advantages of size turn into their limitations.

Easterlin posits this argument: when there are large pools of young people trying to enter the work force, unemployment is high, especially in that youthful age group. Difficulty in finding a job and thus security are inversely related to an individual's willingness to marry and have children. An additional fly in the ointment is the fact that far more women are in the labor force than at any point in the recent past. The entrance of large numbers of women into the labor force compounds the unemployment problem. Additionally, women who are working, especially in a rewarding career, are less

likely to be willing to give up their careers for marriage, much less for child-bearing.

Traditionally, the government in an attempt to stem unemployment draws upon "demand side" monetary and fiscal policies. However, these policies are not effective because the labor skills needed for demand-driven output are not in the employment pool. The result is that the new demand initiated by traditional government policies does very little to expand the proposed output and instead accelerates an increasing price spiral.

This stagflation syndrome is compounded by one other factor that Easterlin proposes, which, in turn, increases the depression of the marriage/child-bearing effort. The baby boom in comparing themselves to their parents has a generally lower feeling of relative well-being. The baby boom parents were a much smaller generation and thus had many more employment opportunities and plenty of room to move up the career ladder. The baby boomers saw the success of their parents and formed their aspirations based on these successes.

These aspirations have been increasingly smothered as the flood of baby boomers enter the career age and find that there are several million others, just like them, trying to climb toward higher rungs on the career ladder. Salaries and wages are depressed because workers are so plentiful, thus marriage and child-bearing are delayed.

You remember the mention made earlier that some elements of the baby boom cohort had difficulty making commitments? These people grew up in a very tenuous, here today, gone tomorrow, world. Everything was questioned and usually found wanting, even the institution of marriage. The baby boom was repeatedly told of its potential

and the many opportunities that awaited them on the road of life. Being tied down, without the flexibility necessary to keep options open appeared to many as a large pothole in that road of life.

Let us enumerate the deterring forces which have led to the downturn in marriage (thus, the Baby Bust) and the upturn in divorces with resultant non-traditional households increasing.

1. A poor economic outlook, a problem contributed to because of the large size of the baby boom.
2. The lingering aspirations based on the success of the baby boomers' parents.
3. The memories of the fantastic "promised" opportunities in which the baby boom could indulge later in life.
4. The seeming inability to make long term commitments which were perceived to close off options.
5. The increase in numbers of women who were finding rewarding work and were not prepared to go back to the traditional role of housewife.

While not inclusive, this list certainly includes major factors contributing to the failure of the baby boomers to propagate.

This impact of the baby boom (the lack of affecting its echo) could perhaps be the impact with the most long-range ramifications to date. It certainly insures the fact that the cohorts on either side of this huge bulge will be smaller. In turn, this insures the continuing of the baby boom to bully its way through the rest of its life, continuing to change former societal arrangements and draw attention to its needs at the various age segments it occupies.

As this generation has defied various expectations to date we can be reasonably sure that it will continue to do so throughout its run. As we have seen in this section, the baby boom was "set up" to act in a seemingly abnormal way because of a number of factors encountered during its youth.

The final section of this paper will seek to enumerate the future impacts of the baby boom from 1983 to the middle of the next century when the "tyranny" of this generation will wane.

Section III

Future Impacts of the Baby Boom Cohort: 1983-2045

The third and final section will focus primarily on three major aspects of American life and the impacts of the baby boom cohort: the economic outlook, the political outlook, and the prospects of the increasing burden of health care for the elderly.

An older or younger population is defined by median age--the point at which half the population is older and half the population is younger. Except for a brief period after World War II, the median age of the U.S. population has risen steadily from 23 in 1900 to 30 in 1980. The rise in median age is most likely to continue well into the twenty-first century because of the aging baby boom cohort and, to date, its failure to affect a major "echo". Ansley Coale has demonstrated that the principle ingredient which reduces the proportion of people in the younger ages and increases the proportion of people at older ages in a population's aging is not the average at death but rather low fertility. (Coale, 1964)

The situation of a large cohort surrounded by smaller cohorts is unique in U.S. history. As we have seen, it has already posed problems for the U.S. society and will for years to come.

A central thesis of this section will deal with the typical inelasticity of institutions with which people engage early and late in life. Examples of inelastic institutions of early life include schools and other socializing tools. Examples of later life institutions include the social security system and various forms of elderly health care. An overriding psychological inelasticity is found

in the "roles" relegated to the young and old in our society. We have seen the psychological inelasticity of age-specific roles tested by the baby boom during its youth. The "seen and not heard" role of youth was all but done away with as the baby boom banded together either within themselves or by the marketplace. We must associate a certain degree of likelihood that this will occur again as the baby boom approaches old age.

Why is this banding together to challenge inelastic institutions abandoned in the mid-life period? The move to band together during the most productive years of the baby boom's life is not necessary. The generational identity and power of numbers which challenged so many aspects of American society in the sixties and seventies has dissipated as the cohort entered the labor market and started their careers. The economy and opportunities which support it are much more elastic, accommodating, and rewarding. In short, when things are going your way, why fight it? Whereas the baby boomers were compacted and relegated to secondary roles by the social institutions of their youth, the need for strength in numbers was high. The nature of institutions created for the young and elderly have inherent features which are compacting and inelastic. There is little, if any, reason to believe that as the baby boomers approach retirement and later life, we will not again see this banding together for political clout.

We can already see two potential targets for the baby boom's next agenda for change: health care costs and the social security system.

In 2030 those born between 1955 and 1964 will be aged 65 to 74. Those baby boomers and their older counterparts will number well over 60 million and represent perhaps 20 percent of the U.S. population, compared to 26 million elderly persons today comprising 11 percent of the population (Population Reference Bureau, 1982).

"Health care costs, which have doubled as a proportion of the nation's output in the past three decades, are almost certain to go higher--how much no one knows, though the possibilities are staggering. Those over sixty-five (already) account for nearly one-third of the nation's health bill...Perhaps 30 percent of the federal budget--the largest single slice, bigger even than defense--goes toward spending for the elderly." (Samuelson, 1982)

The current situation, reflected in the above quote, is bright compared to the future situation when the baby boom ages. The compounding problem is the fact that there will be a much smaller proportion of the population supporting the graying baby boom. It will be interesting to watch for possibilities for inter-generational friction in the future.

The political outlook for the future will depend upon many interrelated factors, not the least of which is the economy. The economic prospects and the political outlook are irrevocably intertwined.

Remembering the pig in the python analogy, the smaller good times cohort which preceded the baby boom cohort is now starting to retire by the thousands. The large baby boom cohort is moving into

an overcrowded job market. Emerging from this shift is a series of economic and social changes that are likely to shape the lives of all Americans for decades to come.

For one thing, as Easterlin pointed out, a person's chance for success and happiness depends to a greater degree on the year he or she was born. A relative lack of competition for jobs and status is cited as one reason for the prosperity and social stability enjoyed by the good times cohort who entered adulthood during the fifties. Now, however, these middle-aged individuals are being followed by the teeming ranks of baby boomers, who are fighting for jobs and often settling for lower level positions that are also needed by the next wave of job seekers.

As these underemployed boomers pile up, more and more Americans will find career ladders blocked. As this increasingly becomes the case, Charles Westoff predicts, "...our view of America as the land of opportunity is going to fade." The frustration with the job situation described by Landon Jones (1980) as the "promotion squeeze" will transfer into political action. As some analyses predict, there might be a call for economic insurance such as is described by Robert Theobald (1972). Under policies implementing Basic Economic Security (B.S.E.) "the right to income will not depend on the ability to find or hold a job but rather on the situation of the individual. People with certain characteristics--youth, age, sickness, unemployment--are entitled to funds on the basis of these characteristics." One could reasonably expect welfare-state policies such as this from a generation who has already demonstrated its con-

cern for the poor and repressed, especially when workers are frustrated by fierce competition and meager rewards.

On the other side of the coin, however, growing numbers of Americans are moving into the more settled age brackets. As this increases within the baby boom one could reasonably predict a trend toward conservatism. This political shift would follow patterns of the past, but again, it is too easy to predict for such an unpredictable cohort. What much of the baby boom's past and current experience could add up to is we could have a large generation for whom the American system has not worked. As a result, we could see the cry for individual rights and free enterprise increasingly overshadowed by the rights of the whole society. Regardless of the movement toward conservatism or socialism there will be more baby boomers voting their preference. This is one thing we know; more older people vote than younger people.

A conflict which is already shaping up is over the social security system. As the baby boomers age and expect improved benefits, the potential for an enormous drain on the country's fiscal resources is likely.

Within fifty years one beneficiary will be drawing payments for every two workers paying into the fund instead of the current one for every three ratio. Unless taxes are raised, increasing amounts of immigrants are allowed in the U.S., or the fertility rates increase, the social security system will go broke. If we believe that the baby boom cohort has had a somewhat frustrating experience with "the establishment" in the past, that frustration will pale in significance

to the prospect of a bankrupt social security system.

So as not to paint too dismal a picture, we must recognize that the baby boom will not start retiring in large numbers until 2010. There are a few decades to plan and redesign the system for this eventuality. We can bet that the driving force for this change will come from the efforts of the baby boomers.

The graying of the baby boom will also bring some positive changes. Since teenagers are responsible for a disproportionate rate of crime and traffic accidents, we will be able to look forward to a decrease in these two tragedies. Additionally, having fewer children will leave the baby boomers with more per capita income to help care for the elderly or spend on themselves. From a demographic perspective, the economy should be relatively strong because of fewer dependents, and, once again, the sheer size and predicted spending power of the baby boom cohort.

Market analysis shows that ages 35-44 years old group is the biggest spending group in the U.S. They buy many of the big ticket durables that bolster our country's economy. As Landon Jones notes, the 35-44 bracket spending power "will rise 70 percent until they command one-third of the country's discretionary income" (Jones, 1980, p. 275). From this point of view, the economy will be doing better by 1990.

Because of the high degree of education the baby boom generally received and their projected overall higher per capita incomes, businessmen and politicians alike are going to have to take older people more seriously, especially the boomers. They will not be as

"brand loyal" in either selecting products or selecting political representatives. If the baby boom appears to turn toward a conservative stance, it will be interesting to see how deep the conservative veneer goes. This writer believes that if the baby boom does take a conservative turn, the old liberal attitudes will be right under the surface. Since it has been an inherent feature of the baby boom to switch frequently, be it TV channels, automobiles, or spouses, any interest trying to appeal to the baby boom had best make sure their pollsters are competent.

Another aspect of the political outlook involves the further emergence of women on the political scene. The openness of attitudes which became a trademark of the baby boom could produce a climate which would see the first woman president. I believe women are perceived as more affiliative in nature and the "soft approach" to politics might become a desired end. Certainly the attitudes which have been formed by the baby boomers have been uniquely different if for no other reason than they were shared by so many. It is difficult to purge strong feelings of idealism, even in difficult times. Regardless of these difficult times, the baby boom will continue to fight in various ways, be it consumer and other advocacies, the need for a new type of economic/social system, or at the very least a new political agenda. I believe an emerging attitude will be: "How much difference can there be between the political and social battles of the sixties and seventies and what we currently face?"

The following list enumerates a number of factors which this writer is willing to predict as a result of the growing sophistication and political clout of the baby boom.

1. A movement toward a more liberal ideology, where the rights of the entire society emerge instead of specific individual rights. This will probably be mixed with short duration conservative fixes, but the long term trend will be more liberal.

2. An upturn in the economic outlook in the near future. This will be as a result of the increased disposible income of the largest market in the society approaching age brackets which typically buy big ticket durable items.

3. Increased political activity to shore up the social security system and other government pension plans. This will most probably include increased taxes, strict abortion laws, more liberal immigration policies, or perhaps a total redesigning of the system.

4. More women in politics as a result of a desire for soft politics; also, as the baby boom ages, there will be an increasing number of females, since males are prone to die eariler.

5. As baby boomers approach retirement, there will be a large migration to rural areas. Two reasons for this: first, it is a fact that a significant number of retirees move to the country; and second,

an old theme of the turbulent baby boom period was "drop out" which usually meant go to the country. This old attitude coupled with the fact that some version of Toffler's Electronic Cottage will exist, will allow large numbers to move to the country without trading off security and safety.

6. Look for heated inter-generational conflicts. It should be particularly interesting this time because it won't only be the young versus the old, it will also be (again) the many versus the few.

7. More liberal policies toward euthanasia, and discontinuation of costly life support measures for those who are judged hopelessly ill. These policy shifts will be a result of psychological problems related to growing old coupled with a segment of the population who will not be able to afford growing old. These two factors could also serve as catalysts for increased suicide rates among the elderly.

8. A resurgence of cooperatives for food, housing, health care, energy, etc., especially among the old.

9. Growing strength of religions, both traditional and non-traditional. This will be a result of increasing numbers of the population seeing the end and wishing to "set things right".

10. Greater participation in public and community affairs and social organizations. There will be greater leisure time, increasing in-

terest in politics and increased need for affiliation.

11. The banding together of the baby boom in later life for political clout and drawing attention to their needs and concerns.

These eleven predictions represent a few of the major changes which will occur as a result of the graying of the baby boom. There are many secondary ramifications of each.

This cohort has, to date, been the catalyst for many major changes in American society. As the baby boom ages, and begins to use their decades of experience, and also to organize more effectively, we can expect to see more major changes. It is almost as if the baby boom was given the role of societal change agent from the first. The baby boom has always had the strength to adapt to the disappointments of life. With the wisdom that age brings, I feel confident that even though the baby boom did not completely find the special place in the American dream they were told of, they will work to effect changes that will improve the workings of our society. It will be challenging, in fact, very rough at times; but once the boomers feel confident and somewhat in control again, the switch from early optimism to mid-life pessimism will revert to optimism again. After all, what purpose is served by being old and pessimistic?

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APPENDIX A

Baby Boom and Baby Bust

TABLE I

Fertility rates were high and births rising during the baby-boom years. Fertility rates fell dramatically and births declined during the baby-bust years.

Baby Boom

Year	Fertility Rate*	Births
1947	113.3	3,817,000
1948	107.3	3,637,000
1949	107.1	3,649,000
1950	106.2	3,632,000
1951	111.5	3,823,000
1952	113.9	3,913,000
1953	115.2	3,965,000
1954	118.1	4,078,000
1955	118.5	4,104,000
1956	121.2	4,218,000
1957	122.9	4,308,000
1958	120.2	4,255,000
1959	118.8	4,245,000
1960	118.0	4,258,000
1961	117.2	4,268,000
1962	112.2	4,167,000
1963	108.5	4,098,000
1964	105.0	4,027,000

Baby Bust

Year	Fertility Rate*	Births
1965	96.6	3,760,000
1966	91.3	3,606,000
1967	87.6	3,521,000
1968	85.7	3,502,000
1969	86.5	3,600,000
1970	87.9	3,731,000
1971	81.8	3,556,000
1972	73.4	3,258,000
1973	69.2	3,137,000
1974	68.4	3,160,000
1975	66.7	3,144,000
1976	65.8	3,168,000
1977	67.8	3,327,000
1978	66.6	3,333,000
1979	68.5	3,494,000
1980	69.2	3,598,000

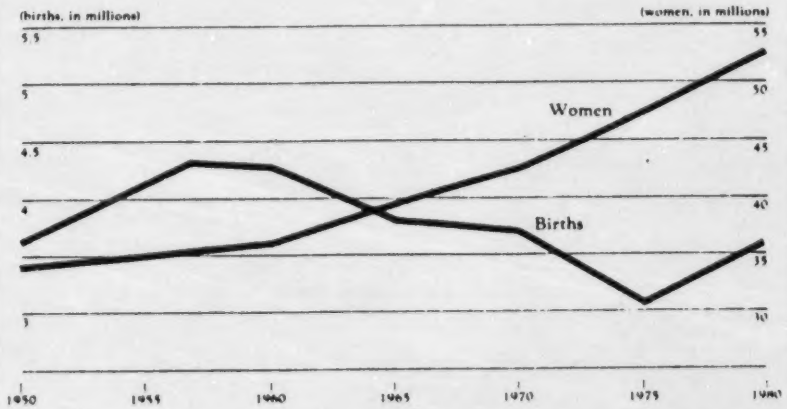
*Live births per 1,000 women aged 15–44

Births and Childbearers

1950–1980

CHART I

In the 1950s only 35 million women in the childbearing ages produced more than 4 million babies a year. In 1980, 53 million women produced less than 4 million babies.



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